Utah Native Plant Society

https://www.unps.org/UNPS-Index.php?page=RarePlants#privat

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Introduction

Utah is home to well over 300 rare plant species including some 24 species that are federally listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Roughly 10% of our total flora is rare, and a great number of those are threatened or endangered, as often their restricted habitat requirements are slowly being lost. Only a few states (California, Florida, Texas and Oregon) are believed to have as many or more rare plant species as Utah. And this number is growing, since every year new species are still being discovered or recognized.

Why care about rare plants? (note: while this link refers to California, the situation in Utah is very similar).

The single most comprehensive source dedicated to Utah rare plants is the **Utah Rare Plant Guide** hosted and maintained by us on a separate site at **http://www.utahrareplants.org.** In 2009, UNPS published its first comprehensive rare plant list for the first time in many years,

using a new ranking method. Extensive updates were then published in 2012 and 2016. For more information see Calochortiana Journal and **Utah Rare Plants .**

Utah's incredibly diverse geography and its unique geologic and soil characteristics have created special microhabitats where a spectacular diversity of life has evolved. In many cases these habitats are harsh, arid lands upon which plant specialists have found a niche. One limited example of that are Washington County's Endangered Plants. These plants require the habitats on which they have specifically adapted and cannot simply be moved nor effectively planted elsewhere. They also support a web of life that taken as a whole represent endangered habitats.

Places in Utah that currently represent "hot spots" where human encroachments are impacting areas of high biological diversity includes the **St. George/Bloomington** and surrounding areas in Washington County (rapid habitat loss due to urban sprawl and residential developments), **Uinta Basin** (severe energy development impacts on a massive scale), **Cedar City** residential and commercial expansion into Cedar Valley and as a result of renewed iron mining activities to the west in Iron County, Sevier County (energy and recreational/off-road vehicle use on Arapien shale such as in the **Rainbow Hills**) and Wayne County (such as **Factory Butte** recreational impacts). There are *many* other areas of concern include the continued loss of foothills habitat and almost complete loss of valley habitats along the **central Wasatch Front** in Davis, Salt Lake and Utah counties, and resort and related developments in the **Park City** area **(Summit County)** which all contain historically high levels of plant and animal diversity.

Impacts to rare and other native plants by development activities are related to those involving human health in many ways. For example, see **Ozone in the Uinta Basin** by the Utah Department of Environmental Quality.

An increasing threat to native plants generally is the spread of invasive species (which is specifically tied to land disturbances caused by people as well as a result of bad decision making). In addition to a long list of species that have caused devastasting damage such as tamarisk, Russian olive and cheatgrass, a more recent example along the central Wasatch Front is the troublesome Myrtle or "donkey tail" spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinities*) which is spreading up our canyons and dominants many different kinds of habitats, and which has spread from extensive residential plantings. Riparian habitats generally are among our most threatened and typically in areas proximate human populations where they still exist have largely been replaced by non-native species.

What follows are some references to federal and state land management agencies that administer programs relating to rare plant species in Utah, as well as several private

organizations and other issues that related to rare plants along with some additional background information on the role UNPS has played over the past 30 years.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Mountain-Prairie region

The Utah Field Office provides project guidance and in general is the primary agency responsible for administration of the found here. See also the rare plants page of the Utah Rare Plants Guide.

This list has not changed much since the list as of January 11, 2003 which then included 25 species. As of October 2011, the number of species is 24. While as of this date no new species have been listed since 2001 and most prior candidate species dropped, some new species have become candidates and some additional species should be added over the next several years.

A number of our federally listed species are depicted in our Threatened and Endangered Plants of Utah poster.

Bureau of Land Management, Utah State Office

The INTERIM Bureau of Land Management Sensitive Plant Species List for Utah February 2011 (109 taxa) maintained by the BLM's Utah State Office provides guidance for the management of sensitive plant species occurring on BLM lands in Utah.

In accordance with Instruction Memorandum No. 2011-037 dated April 18, 2011, an updated sensitive plant species list became effective for BLM lands in Utah. This new list was the first comprehensive update since August of 2002 and replaced that older list plus a few subsequent amendments. The INTERIM Bureau of Land Managegment Sensitive Plant Species List for Utah December 2018 list contains some 104 taxa (compared to 99 in the prior August 2002 list). The BLM sensitive plant species list does not include taxa with a federal status, i.e. it is not all-inclusive of all species/taxa that are endangered and threatened in Utah. Even individuals with general BLM botanical collecting permits may not collect species that are on this list.

Past BLM sensitive plant species lists and amendments

Changes to the BLM Sensitive Plant Species List for Utah August 2002 (99 taxonomic entities) which is included here only for historical reference, included Instruction Memorandum No. UT 2007-078 dated September 26, 2007, when the BLM added *Penstemon grahamii*, formerly a candidate species, to the list. The candidate status was lost because of the denial of a listing

petition that involved interference at the Washington, DC level. And, effective June 30, 2009, *Astragalus equisolensis* was added "back" to the list. Like *P. grahamii*, *A. equisolensis* was formerly a FWS candidate species. After being on the candidate list since September 27, 1985, on September 12, 2006 it was removed due to questions about its status in Colorado. Therefore as of September, 12 2006 by BLM policy, it was also not considered to be BLM sensitive. In accordance with BLM Instruction Memorandum No. UT 2009-045 dated July 30, 2009, this species was added back to the BLM list, and the effective date, while not stated in the memo, was June 30, 2009.

On December 15, 2008, the BLM announced changes to its 6840 Manual for Management of Special Status Species which had previously not been updated since 2001. The manual provides guidance to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act and in connection with its special status species program which includes "sensitive" plant species.

Forest Service (Utah/Region 4)

On March 30, 2010, the Forest Service updated its 1994 list and 13 sensitive plant species which occur on Utah forests were added.

Intermountain Region (R4) Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Plant Species March 2010 list

Purely for reference purposes, the following link to the 1994 list is provided.

Intermountain Region (R4) Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Plant Species 1994 list

Forests in the region are not yet operating under the 2005 planning rule. Several forests are in the revision process as of September, 2008.

In July of 2009, profiles of critically imperiled plant profiles in FS Region 4 became available in the Celebrating Wildflowers section.

- Dixie-Fishlake
- **Uinta-Wasatch-Cache**
- Ashley N.F.
- Manti-LaSal N.F.

Other federal protections

The Lacey Act helps to regulate illegally obtained plants that are moved across state lines. An import declaration requirement was added via the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 along with other expanded protections.

Pesticides that may impact endangered species are supposed to be monitored under the EPA's Endangered Species Protection Program. In terms of its implementation in Utah, see the Utah State University extension pesticide no. 13 fact sheet. In connection with plants, while the focus on the individual plant species and its habitat is important, it misses the critical nature of pollinators and particularly bees. Bees are very sensitive to the use of pesticides. A tremendously important introductory article in this regard and which outlines the need to conserve native bees if there is to be any chance of conserving the vast majority of our rare plant species is "Wild Bees and Floral Jewels" by Dr. Vincent Tepedino (originally published in the Xerces magazine *Wings* in Spring 1997, Vol. 20, #1, see Wings: Back Issues and reprinted and available on-line here; another Tepedino article entitled "Native Bees" can be found in the UNPS *Sego Lily* 1991 archive, vol. 14, issue no. 2 available here). The places where bees live are not necessarily the same as where rare plant species live and therefore consideration of essential or "critical" habitat for plant species *must* consider and encompass protection of pollinator habitat including appropriate buffer zones.

International trade in endangered species is regulated by CITES, an international agreement between various governments throughout the world of which the United States is a party and is enforced by the USDA. See also Permits for Non-native Species or Import and Export of Non-Native and Native Species.

State of Utah

Utah Conservation Data Center ***(click on Plants).*** The Utah Natural Heritage Program (State Of Utah, Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife Resources) has since 1988 collected data on rare or declining native species and serves as a central repository for that information for use by land managers and the general public. The State of Utah however has essentially no laws that protect rare, sensitive, endangered nor threatened plant species. The state's largest land management agency, **School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration** (SITLA), chooses not to avail itself of the extensive information available to it in the course of considering projects and their impacts on rare Utah native plant treasures.

Herbaria

All of the herbaria located within Utah as well as many located elsewhere play a vital role in understanding differences between plant species and providing distribution and historical records that are of inestimable value. Major herbaria in Utah includes those located at Utah State, the University of Utah, Utah Valley University and Brigham Young University although there are many others. Without taxonomists who most commonly are associated with herbaria, there would be no way to even determine what plants were rare or uncommon in the first place.

Private organizations

A number of organizations have played important roles in rare plant advocacy in Utah. This is not meant to be a complete list.

The Nature Conservancy (Great Basin Field Office). Of all private organizations, **TNC** has time after time served a critical role in protecting rare plant habitats, not the least of which relate to the Clay Phacelia, the Autumn Buttercup and the Dwarf Bearclaw Poppy, and in fostering the Utah Natural Heritage Program. In the last decade they have been particularly active in connection with essential state land acquisitions in Washington County, and in taking the lead role in connection with the Uinta Basin Rare Plants forum which seeks to avoid numerous rare plant conflicts through cooperative planning efforts.

Red Butte Garden. **Red Butte Garden** has a conservation program that specifically relates to Utah rare plants and plays a key role in encouraging the appreciation and understanding of rare plants. Some rare species are displayed strictly for educational purposes (not to encourage their use in horticulture per se nor to indicate that individuals should be removing rare plants from the wild, but more in the nature of a botanical museum). They also actively work in numerous collaborative areas including seed banking, rare plant surveys, coordinating the annual Utah rare plants meeting, and maintaining a living collection of rare plants. Red Butte Garden is also affiliated with the **Center for Plant Conservation**.

Rocky Mountain Wild. (formerly Center for Native Ecosystems). Based in Colorado, **RMW** has been an exceptionally important advocate for the conservation of Utah rare plants in Utah's Uinta Basin.

Earthjustice. **Earthjustice** has been a truly invaluable ally in advocating for ESA protections in eastern Utah and western Colorado.

Center for Native Ecosystems. Based in Colorado, **CNE** has been an important advocate for the conservation of Utah rare plants in Utah's Uinta Basin.

Center for Biological Diversity. CBD has been a vital partner with respect to endangered plant issues in both southwestern Utah and in the Uinta Basin.

Other important **Utah rare plant conservation partners** have included **the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance** , **Grand Canyon Trust** , **Western Resource Advocates** , **Western Watersheds Project** , **WildEarth Guardians** , **Wild Utah Project** (now **Sageland Collaborative**) , and **Friends of Great Salt Lake** .

We are exceptionally grateful for the work provided by numerous individuals within all of these organizations.

UNPS and rare plants

The founding of UNPS in 1978 was in large part due to the concern for the survival of various rare/endangered plant species. UNPS has been an advocate for the protection of many rare plant species and held annual rare plant review meetings and conferences in the 1980's and thru the early 90's (which have been revived by UNPS starting again in the late 90's). In early 1983 UNPS initiated conservation action for the dwarf bearclaw poppy, *Arctomecon humilis* and has been active in its conservation ever since (for more information about this species see Washington County's Endangered Plants and Dwarf Bearclaw Poppy Conservation History). As parts of its conservation and education efforts, in 1988 UNPS produced a filmstrip entitled To Save A Species: Dwarf BearClaw Poppy (see the poppy conservation history for more details and scans of some of the original slides used to produce that filmstrip.)

UNPS has partnered with other conservation organizations, most notably The Nature Conservancy, to assist in protecting rare plant habitats (one example being the clay phacelia, *Phacelia argillacea*). The UNPS *Sego Lily* newsletter has often served as a source of original (and only!) publication for certain information about Utah rare plants.

Dr. Duane Atwood, then with the US Forest Service (and formerly a long term board member of UNPS and rare plant chair) spearheaded the 1991 publication *Utah Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive Plant Field Guide* ("blue book") which was one of the first field guides of its kind and which became a model for other states to follow.

After investigating options in 2001, in early 2002 UNPS began a prototype conversion of the blue book in hopes that funding could be found to update and complete it. Federal funding as it turns out was appropriated by the BLM in 1997 to update the book, and UNPS in 2003 partnered with The National Park Service, Forest Service and the BLM under a challenge grant to assist in an effort to make a web-enabled as well as a printable/CD version of the blue book.

That led to the **http://www.utahrareplants.org** project that we will plan to continue to work on indefinitely.

Following the resurrection of our rare plant committee in 2007, in 2009 a draft comprehensive list was presented at the annual rare plant task force meeting in March of 2009. This list was finalized and subsequently published in the **November-December 2009 Sego Lily newsletter** and at the same time the full list was published here on November 1, 2009: **UNPS 2009 Utah rare plant list in XLS format.**

We frequently comment on proposed BLM, Forest Service and other projects and related impacts on rare plants. In this regard, see **Committees** --> **Conservation** --> **News and Letters** as well as the **News** and **Archived News** sections.

While not our preferred course of action, events of recent years have forced us join or advocate suits in situations where government funding has been lacking or fully absent and/or when the provisions of the Endangered Species Act have not been adequately addressed (which occurred at an acute and unprecedented level during the Bush-Cheney reign). This has included (no membership fees have been used to support these activities):

- *Penstemon grahamii* (2002 - petition to list) - which led to a successful proposal to list but then withdrawn - see more below)
- *Sclerocactus brevispinus* (2005 - petition to list - settled with an ultimately successful outcome since species is now listed)
- *Astragalus desereticus* (2005 - critical habitat designation)
- *Astragalus holmgreniorum* and *Astragalus ampullarioides* (2004 - critical habitat designation). This action was successful. See **Saving the Holmgren's Milkvetch** and **Saving the Shivwitz Milkvetch**.
- *Penstemon grahamii* (2003, 2008, 2015 - suit to list 2003, successful to the point of FWS recommendation to list; suit to overturn FWS Dec. 2006 decision not to list following listing proposal, successfully required FWS to reconsider for listing; 2015 suit filed due to proposed listing that was then inappropriately withdrawn in 2014). **More information**

In 2002 we also became signatory to the **Equal Protection for Plants Campaign** initiated by the **California Native Plant Society.**

What other kinds of things besides habitat loss are threatening our native plant species?

Oil & Gas impacts on rare plants

Everyday ways to help endangered species.

[10 easy things you can do to save endangered species.]

Support a **strong** Endangered Speces Act: [Panelists Urge House Committee to Maintain a Strong Endangered Species Act to Protect Wildlife on the Brink of Extinction](June 25, 2015).

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